DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 360 743 EA 025 197

AUTHOR Lyman, Linda L.
TITLE Understanding Board of Education Decision-Making Processes.
PUB DATE Apr 93
NOTE 35p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Atlanta, GA, April 12-16, 1993).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Board Administrator Relationship; Board of Education Role; *Boards of Education; Case Studies; *Decision Making; Elementary Secondary Education; Policy Formation; *Sexual Abuse; *Superintendents

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the findings of a single case study of a particular board of education's decision-making process in a crisis situation, and explores interpretation of those findings from two theoretical perspectives. The crisis resulted from the charges against and conviction of the superintendent for a sexual assault on a 17-year-old female student. The study combines elements of qualitative research and historical analysis. Answers to descriptive and interpretive research questions result from inductive content analysis of 42 public documents and transcripts from 10 oral testimony interviews. Of the board's 11 documented decisions, 2 were identified as key or crucial decisions. They were: (1) the decision to delay action with respect to the superintendent's continuing employment until after the court verdict; and (2) the decision, after the conviction, to allow the superintendent to retire early in a settlement that enhanced his retirement benefits. Ten factors and issues influencing the two key decisions are discussed. The theoretical interpretations explored are the Constraints Model of Policymaking Processes developed by Irving Janus (1989) and selected findings from research on school board culture. (Contains 29 references.) (RR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 360 743

UNDERSTANDING BOARD OF EDUCATION DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

Linda L. Lyman
Bradley University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

L. Lyman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta, Georgia. April, 1993.

EA 025 197

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

This paper presents the findings of a single case study of a particular board of education's decision-making processes in a crisis situation, and explores interpretation of those findings from two theoretical perspectives. The crisis faced by this board resulted from the charges and conviction of the superintendent of the sexual assault of a 17-year-old female student. The study combines elements of qualitative research and historical analysis. Answers to descriptive and interpretive research questions result from inductive content analysis of 42 public documents and transcripts from ten oral testimony interviews. Of the board's 11 documented decisions, two were identified as key or crucial decisions by those interviewed: the six former board members (including the researcher), the former assistant superintendent, the newspaper editor, an organizer of a citizen's group, and an attorney who was a candidate for election to the board during the crisis. Ten factors and issues influencing the two key decisions are discussed. The theoretical interpretations explored are the Constraints Model of Policymaking Processes developed by Irving Janis (1989), and selected findings from school board culture research.

young woman who was a student at the high school. The judge announced the "guilty as charged" verdict on August 31. The board accepted the superintendent's "early retirement" resignation on September 5 and suspended him from duties, with pay continuing until December 1, the date on which he became entitled to higher state retirement benefits. On October 22 the judge sentenced the superintendent to 30 days in the county jail, placed him on probation for 18 months, fined him $500, and ordered him to perform 200 hours of community service.

Community Context and Major Figures

The conservative medium-sized community in which these events happened is located in a midwestern rural area. The school district has one high school, two junior highs, and nine elementary schools. In this community the board of education is composed of six persons, each elected to four-year terms. Every two years half of the board is up for reelection. In the spring of 1984, the six members of the board of education ranged in age from mid-30s to early 70s. Fictitious names have been assigned to all persons involved in the study. The researcher will be identified as "Susan Brown."

The senior member of the board was Bob Clark, a retired businessman in his early 70s, who was serving his twelfth year on the board. He and the superintendent were personal friends. Next in seniority was Janice Jones, an active community volunteer in her late 50s, who was serving her tenth year. She was not present for several of the early board decisions. Mike Johnson, a medical practitioner in his mid-30s, was in his ninth year, having been appointed to the board in 1976. The other three members of the board were running for reelection. Two were serving the eighth year of their second terms. Ray Miller, a foreman for an industrial operation, was in his mid-50s. A former coach and retired educator in his early 70s, Oliver Smith was still working for the district athletic director part time. He was in almost daily contact with the superintendent through this employment and considered the superintendent a personal friend. Miller also considered the superintendent a personal friend. Board president Susan Brown, an educational consultant who was serving her fourth year on the board, was also running for reelection. In her early 40s, she

Understanding Board of Education Decision-Making Processes

Introduction

Boards of education are decision-making groups that sometimes must make decisions during crises. For a superintendent to be accused of criminal activity creates a genuine crisis for a board of education. The type of routine decision making practiced by many boards, based on information and recommendations supplied by the superintendent, is no longer possible. Legal issues may or may not be easily understandable. Options open to the board may or may not be clear. Decision making may or may not be rational. The decisions under review and subjected to analysis in this case study were the decisions of a board of education in a midwestern community in 1984 in response to sexual assault charges against the superintendent of schools. The superintendent, with 15 years of service to the community, was ultimately convicted of the third degree sexual assault of a 17-year-old female student.

According to public documents, the board of education made a series of 11 decisions as the case unfolded. The board's decisions both provoked criticism and received support from members of the community. The researcher, serving as board president, participated in the board's decisions and experienced the complexity of decision making in such a crisis. The problem addressed in this historical case study, undertaken as dissertation research, was identification of the factors and issues that influenced the board's decisions. Those factors and issues having been identified, possible interpretations were considered. The research reported in this paper occurred in 1990, six years after the events. Analysis of the board's decision-making processes in this case contributes to understanding of board of education decision-making processes.

Because the board decided to delay any action until after a court decision on the sexual assault charge, the superintendent remained in his position from June 1, 1984, when the charges were filed, through the summer months and during the two-day trial, August 29-30. The misdemeanor sexual assault charge stemmed from a four-week police investigation of allegations made by a

was the newest member of the board.

Oral testimonies of four other major figures are part of the case study. Jim Wilson was the editor of the newspaper. He was generally supportive of the school district, but concerned about whether the board's practices conformed to standards of the public meetings law. Tim Palmer, an attorney, was then a candidate for election to the board of education and had definite opinions about what the board's actions should have been in response to this crisis situation. Elected in November of 1984, Palmer was still serving on the board when this case study was conducted in 1990. Carol Canfield was Chair of the Sexual Assault Task Force of the Area Women's Council in 1984. In response to the board's inaction, she organized and coordinated the "Committee for a Responsible Educational System," a group that lobbied the board for a sexual harassment policy. She was employed as a mental health professional. David Randolph was assistant superintendent of schools and had served in that position throughout the entire 15 years of the superintendent's tenure in the community. He managed the business affairs of the district, working with the superintendent on a daily basis.

The ten persons interviewed for this case study research had varying responses when asked, "When you think back to the period of time from May to October, 1984, what general impression comes to mind?" The six board members reported differing impressions. Oliver Smith remembered "surprise" and "doubt as to whether he was guilty or not" (Smith, 1990, p. 1). Mike Johnson talked about the "trauma that the entire community suffered . . . and a very high pressure time for the individual board members" (Johnson, 1990, p. 1). Janice Jones said: "The general impression that comes to my mind is the difficult issue we were dealing with and how fair we wanted to be to everyone concerned" (Jones, 1990, p. 4). Former board president Susan Brown characterized her impression with the word "frustration" (Brown, 1990, p. 1). Ray Miller also put his impression into one word, "trouble" (Miller, 1990, p. 1). Bob Clark remembered that: "It was a very difficult time for the board of education. We had people that were going to criticize us no matter what we did" (Clark, 1990, p. 1).

Carol Canfield, who had been coordinator of the "Committee for a Responsible Educational

System," said: "Actually the impression and the frustration was the lack of action and the lack of attention, but mostly the lack of action" (Canfield, 1990, p. 1). Tim Palmer, the attorney who had been elected to the board in the 1984 election following the superintendent's conviction, remembered: "I was somewhat frustrated by what I saw as their inaction. And the other thing I remember feeling and sensing was . . . that I was glad they were sitting there and making those decisions and not me at that point" (Palmer, 1990, p. 1). The former assistant superintendent, David Randolph, said: "I was shocked hearing about the accusations" (Randolph, 1990, p. 1). Jim Wilson, the newspaper editor, summarized the time from his perspective as "kind of a long period of tension and uncertainty in the community, and a lot of tension for the board, and some for the newspaper as well" (Wilson, 1990, p. 1).

Objectives and Perspectives

Reporting of this research has these objectives: (a) To present the findings of this single case study of a particular board of education's decision-making processes in a crisis situation; and (b) To explore interpretation of those findings from two theoretical perspectives, recognizing that "there are always multiple generalizations to account for any set of particulars" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The two theoretical frameworks that will be considered are the Constraints Model of Policymaking Processes from the field of social psychology (Janis, 1989) and selected observations from a body of literature that will be referred to as school board culture research (e.g., Lutz & Iannaccone, 1970, 1978; Kerr, 1963; Lutz, 1975, 1980; Cooper, 1973). The study was not designed to confirm any particular theory about board of education decision-making processes but to explore the subject through focus on a single case.

Methods

Conducted in 1990, this study combined elements common to qualitative research with methodological characteristics of historical analysis. Elements of qualitative research were: purposeful sampling, interviewing, ongoing inductive data analysis, and triangulation of data.

Characteristics of historical analysis were: the research topic was a past event; primary sources were preferred for data; sources were subjected to techniques of internal and external criticism; and analysis focused on interpretive explanations (McMillan & Schumacher, 1989). Research questions in historical analytical studies typically "focus on events (who, what, when, where), how an event occurred (descriptive), and why the event happened (interpretive)" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1989, pp. 435-436). Such descriptive and interpretive questions were the focus of this study. Data analysis focused on transcripts of ten oral testimonies and a total of 42 public documents, that included primary and secondary source documents. Reliance on public documents and oral testimony interviews provided for two types of triangulation of data: triangulation through the use of different sources, and by the use of differing methods.

Data Sources

Public Documents

The 42 public documents analyzed included board of education minutes from 11 meetings, 29 newspaper clippings, a district news release announcing the formation of a community input committee, and a copy of a legal decision. The 29 newspaper clippings were: 15 articles, 5 editorials, 6 letters to the editor, 2 board statements reprinted in the paper, and the text of the judge's sentencing statement. All of these documents were part of a larger file that also contained letters, personal notes, and miscellaneous confidential legal documents. Documents selected for the study were public documents that either presented the events of the board's decisions, presented a response to the board's decisions, or in some way contributed to understanding the factors and issues that affected the board's key decisions. The documents were subjected to procedures of internal criticism to determine the trustworthiness and accuracy of statements as well as external criticism to verify their authenticity.

Oral Testimonies

Ten transcripts of oral testimonies were obtained from the persons previously profiled: the six board members who participated in the decisions, the assistant superintendent, and three other persons who were among the most vocal critics of the board's decisions. The board members

who made the decisions were logical interviewees, serving as primary sources. The others interviewed were chosen because they were the closest to, or publicly commented in some way, on the board's decisions. They were not selected to be an exhaustive sample, but to provide verification and elaboration of the record. Although eyewitnesses to some of the decisions made by the board, for the most part they provide testimony as secondary sources.

Prior to the interviews, initial inductive content analysis of the newspaper articles and board minutes resulted in identification of 11 board decisions and preliminary identification of factors and issues that influenced, or might have influenced, those board decisions. Other possible influencing factors were suggested by the review of literature. These possible influences were the topics of the 19 questions prepared to guide the interviewer. (See Appendix A) During the interviews, the interviewees suggested other influencing factors and issues not previously considered.

Because the researcher's participant role could have compromised the validity of the study, an experienced oral historian from another community conducted the interviews. Prior to conducting the interviews, she was supplied with an interviewer notebook prepared by the researcher. The notebook contained copies of the 42 public documents, a list of the board's 11 decisions, the list of 19 possible interview questions, a copy of the sexual harassment policy eventually adopted by the board, and brief personal sketches of the ten interviewees. The list of board decisions identified in the public documents was also prepared for each interviewee to focus the interviews and refresh each person's memory. An interview-guide format was used for the one-hour interviews. The interview-guide approach was selected because "formal questionnaires have not been found suitable for oral history research" (Lance, 1978, p. 120). Interviewees were initially contacted about the project by letter. The interviews were scheduled during a follow-up phone call and held either in the homes or offices of the interviewees. The interviews were audiotaped and the tapes were transcribed by a professional secretary. The researcher listened to the tapes to verify the transcriptions before beginning content analysis.

Data Analysis

The analysis of documents and oral testimony transcripts was inductive, working from the data

sources to identify facts and then to present generalizations. Thus, "the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis emerge from the data rather than being imposed on data prior to data collection and analysis" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1984). The Indecks Information Retrieval Card System was used to compile, correlate, and analyze the data (Merriam, 1988). A total of 113 coding categories emerged during the analysis. Research questions were answered after the data had been coded and cross referenced.

Limitation of scope is inherent in single case research. For a participant in a series of decisions to conduct a historical analytical study of those decisions was problematic because of the concern that the researcher's biases would prejudice the collection and analysis of the data. Several features of the study were designed to minimize that possibility, yet limitations in both the design and execution of this study merit comment. The directions to the oral historian who conducted the interviews were to ask as many of the 19 prepared questions as possible during the hour, but to use her judgment in terms of what topics to pursue in more detail. As a result of these directions every interviewee did not have the opportunity to answer all nineteen questions, making comparative quantification of their answers impossible. In retrospect, a standardized interview might have produced better and more comprehensive findings than the interview guide approach.

The researcher was interviewed so that her opinions and reflections would become a part of the data to be analyzed, and her biases explicitly stated. However, having generated the questions that were asked, the researcher had more time to reflect on the answers than anyone else who was interviewed. Because opinions offered after considerable reading and reflection differ in depth of content and degree of articulateness, the persuasiveness of the researcher's biases may have been enhanced. Therefore, including the researcher among those interviewed may have enhanced, not minimized, the effect of researcher bias, but at least any bias is acknowledged. The participant role of the researcher may be considered an asset or a limitation. Both sensitivity to the context and the possibility of bias are enhanced.

An inquiry audit of the process and product of the study was made by an independent researcher as a safeguard against possible omissions or distortions of data due to researcher bias

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The independent researcher audited the conclusions of the study, using a process suggested by Lincoln & Guba (1985), and found the conclusions to be warranted. He stated: "There was a clearly defined audit trail from the original data through the study results to the conclusions derived from the study" (Hoeltke, 1990, p. 232). In Hoeltke's opinion the study results were confirmable and dependable, when restricted to public records and school board member recall of events.

Findings

The research was designed to answer both descriptive and interpretive questions. There were five descriptive research questions: (a) What decisions did the board of education make in response to learning of the allegations against the superintendent? (b) What decisions did the board of education make in response to the charges against the superintendent? (c) What were the reactions in the community to those decisions? (d) What decisions did the board of education make in response to the conviction of the superintendent on the misdemeanor sexual assault charge? (e) What were the reactions in the community to these decisions?

Working from these questions, content analysis of the public documents and oral testimony transcripts established this chronology of board decisions:

1. Took no action after an executive session at a special meeting on May 30, at which a local pastor was present, to discuss a personnel matter.
2. Issued to the news media at the conclusion of the June 11 regular meeting a statement declaring that the board would not comment on the charges against the superintendent until after the court's decision had been made.
3. Formed a board committee at the July 9 regular meeting to investigate sexual harassment policies.
4. Issued to the news media during the July 9 regular meeting a statement reaffirming the board's intention to take no action until after the court's decision.
5. Refused to accept the attorney's resignation at the July 9 regular meeting.

6. Accepted the "early retirement" resignation of the superintendent at the September 5 special meeting, with an effective date of December 1, suspending him with pay until December 1.
7. Appointed David Randolph as Acting Superintendent at the September 5 special meeting.
8. Expanded the committee on sexual harassment policies to include additional representatives from the community at the September 10 regular meeting.
9. Appointed a committee to research methods of selecting a superintendent at the September 10 regular meeting.
10. Appointed a Community Input Committee to assist the board in selecting the new superintendent.
11. Adopted a Sexual Harassment Policy as recommended by the committee at the October 8 regular meeting.

The focus of this paper is presentation of the answers to the interpretive questions. The three interpretive research questions were: (a) What were the board's key decisions? (b) What factors and issues influenced the board's key decisions? (c) How can the board's key decisions be explained?

Key Decisions

Key is used to refer to chief, major, fundamental, crucial, or critical decisions. Key refers to decisions important in terms of the outcomes. Decisions that were perceived as best, worst, or most in need of being redone fit within this meaning of key. The key decisions were identified by examining the responses given by interviewees to three interview questions: (a) What were the key or critical decisions? (b) What were the best and the worst decisions? (c) If the board could redo one decision, what one would you recommend? Each interviewee had a list of the 11 decisions established through analysis of the public documents.

Inductive content analysis of the oral testimony transcripts identified two key or critical decisions: (a) the board's decision to delay action with respect to the superintendent's continuing

employment until after the court verdict; and (b) the board's decision, after the conviction, to allow the superintendent to take "early retirement" in a settlement that enhanced his retirement benefits. These two decisions were each mentioned between 10 and 15 times in interviewee responses to the three questions, while other less critical decisions were only mentioned from three to five times. The decisions were cited as key for numerous reasons. Reasons included those in the following list of both positive and negative consequences of the decisions for the board, the school district, and the community: because the decisions kept the board from "getting into a dog fight" with the superintendent; because the decisions saved the district money; because the decisions reduced the credibility of the board and the entire school system; because the decisions resulted in the defeat of two incumbent board members; because the decisions were, in the words of one of the board's most vocal critics, "a direct insult to the victims and to every student in our school system" (Canfield, 1990, p. 1); and finally, because the decisions divided the community. The decisions were seen as key by the persons who supported the decisions as well as by the persons who opposed them.

Factors and Issues Influencing Key Decisions

Interviewee's explanations for these two key decisions were analyzed and the factors and issues they discussed placed in ten categories: belief in the superintendent's innocence, legal factors and issues, personal relationships, access to information, economic factors, community factors, school board culture, political factors, social issues, and welfare of the students. The interviewees did not all agree about what factors and issues influenced the board's decisions, but for each of these ten categories at least two board members agreed that the factor or issue had been influential. A summary of the evidence for each of the ten categories follows. A full report and review of the evidence can be found in the dissertation (Lyman, 1990).

Belief in the Superintendent's Innocence

Board members Clark, Miller, and Smith believed then and now that the superintendent was innocent of any wrongdoing. They believed that the charges were fabricated by persons in the community, including the county attorney, who wanted to get rid of the superintendent. These

former board members did not find the witnesses who testified against the superintendent to be credible. Clark was a character witness for the superintendent at the trial. Asked if he would do that again, he responded: "Yes, I would, absolutely. As I said, I never kick a man when he is down and I don't turn my back on a friend" (Clark, 1990, p. 14). The three other board members spoke of initial belief in the superintendent's innocence, that turned to disbelief as additional allegations surfaced. For example, Jones said: "I think as the thing developed, I think we all became aware that we were probably dealing with fact and not fiction" (Jones, 1990, p. 1). The interviews with the board members indicated that they are still split three against three on the issue of the superintendent's innocence.

Related to and influencing the board members' perceptions of the superintendent's innocence was the issue of the credibility of the young woman making the charge. Clark, Miller, and Smith questioned her credibility, with Miller saying she was "A young lady who has had trouble" (Miller, 1990, p. 8).

Legal Factors and Issues

The board was influenced by several legal factors and issues. Until the conviction the board stated publicly that maintaining the presumption of innocence justified inaction. Board members Clark, Miller, Jones, and Johnson were particularly concerned with maintaining the presumption of innocence. Clark, Jones, and Johnson mentioned fear of a lawsuit by the superintendent if they were to pre-judge his case in any way and he were to be found innocent. For example, Johnson said: "By the time we did anything to relieve him of the position . . . and he turned out to be innocent, we as board members could have been sued" (Johnson, 1990, p. 14). The guilty verdict left no choice but to dismiss the superintendent, according to several board members. Miller said that even if the verdict had been innocent the superintendent's effectiveness was finished.

Attorney Palmer, on the board at the time of the interviews, believed that the board's actions should have been affected by this effectiveness issue. Palmer tried to point out to the board through correspondence with them as individuals, and in a letter to the editor, that the issue of whether the superintendent was guilty and whether he should continue in his position were two

different issues. When interviewed, he said:

> To the extent that their decision to wait was based on not wanting to pre-judge him and not wanting to indicate to any jury that they thought he was either guilty or not guilty, to that extent I had to commend them because I thought that was clearly what they had to do. They had to not get involved in making judgments on that issue. That wasn't their job, but I thought it was their job to make decisions about whether he should continue as superintendent and I thought that was a completely different issue. (Palmer, 1990, p. 2)

Personal Relationships

According to those interviewed, personal relationships of various kinds both did and did not influence the board's decisions. Clark, Miller, and Smith said that their personal relationships with the superintendent did not influence their decisions. Smith said the superintendent did not influence the board, but "they had a good feeling about him" (Smith, p. 4). The other three board members were split about whether the superintendent influenced the board. Jones and Johnson said there was initial but not ultimate influence. Brown said:

> In many ways the most significant influence on the board and what actions the board took was the superintendent, the way he defined his role as superintendent, his personal relationships with people on the board, and by extension his personal relationships with the power structure in the community. His job was to influence the board. He had been doing that for fifteen years. (Brown, 1990, p. 3)

One personal relationship that affected the decisions, according to the board's critics, was the longstanding friendship between the Craig Spencer, the attorney for the board, and the superintendent. Committee organizer Canfield brought up the issue of the Spencer's friendship with the superintendent, saying: "With the legal counsel being a personal friend, that immediately shades it" (Canfield, 1990, p. 2) The other community persons interviewed agreed about Spencer's influence and thought, in addition, that the board members were influenced by their personal relationships with the superintendent. According to editor Wilson and attorney Palmer, there was speculation in the community that personal friendship between the superintendent and

three of the board members affected the board's decisions. In the words of Wilson, "There were a sizeable number of board members who had a good deal of loyalty to the superintendent personally" (Wilson, 1990, p. 2). Palmer, however, expressed sympathy with the board's position when he said:

> I think there were certain board members who had long term relationships with the superintendent and just simply couldn't believe that anything like this could happen, and I think that influenced them, yes. I think it made it very difficult for them to consider the possibility that this was all going on. That was not strictly limited to board members; it influenced their decision making, but that was a feeling held across the town, even after the guilty verdict. There were an awful lot of people . . . who simply felt that somebody had gotten mad at the superintendent and had put these girls up to this and they had sold the jury on it, and that he was innocent. And there were strong feelings about that throughout the whole thing, and they were based on the fact that the superintendent was an exceptionally likable sort of guy. I think those kinds of personal relationships between members of the board and the superintendent affected their decisions, and I am not saying that in a critical way. (Palmer, 1990, p. 6)

Access to Information

The board's early decision not to conduct a separate investigation into the allegations left curious board members in the position of relying on individual research. Some board members chose to gather additional information on their own. Others thought they were legally bound to remain objective in the event of a possible hearing, and did not want additional information. The board declined the county attorney's offer to share the investigation file. Four board members did not think the board's decisions were affected by lack of access to information. The two other board members disagreed.

Attorney Palmer said that from his perspective the decision making of the former board had customarily been hampered by limited information. Committee organizer Canfield thought the board was wrong in not looking at the county attorney's information, stating:

> If the evidence is there, I as a school board member, would have been down at that office reading, checking on the facts, because my main job as a school board member is the hiring of that person who runs that school system and to be responsible to the taxpayers. If I don't know what is going on in that person's life, I am in trouble. I think they thought that they could separate legal issues from personal issues. I think they truly believed that the superintendent would somehow sue them. That was the line I got over and over again, never thinking about the fact that citizens could sue them . . . I think their role was to find out. They just really believed that they didn't have a right to that information somehow. (Canfield, 1990, p. 6)

Economic Factors

Miller, Jones, and Johnson said that costs were a factor in their decisions, but Smith said costs did not have anything to do with the board's decisions. Miller was the only board member to specifically mention cost as a factor in discussing the initial decision to delay board action until after the court's decision. Miller, Jones, and Johnson also said that cost was an influencing factor in their decisions to accept the negotiated resignation. Former assistant superintendent Randolph agreed that costs were a factor in that decision, as did the newspaper editor. Editor Wilson said: "I am under the impression that they thought if they didn't make that kind of an agreement that they would have litigation that would be more expensive than essentially buying out the contract" (Wilson, 1990, p. 4).

Community Influence

The board members were in disagreement about whether their decisions had been influenced by the community power structure, the newspaper, or the "Committee for a Responsible Education System." When interviewed, editor Wilson expressed his opinion that the community did not particularly influence the board's decisions. He answered:

> I think not to any great extent. I think to some extent they felt that there were pressures out there that they needed to respond to, but I think they were kind of trapped in a no win situation, where they had to spend a great deal [of energy] on legal counsel and kind of

> attempt to draw a fine line between public policy and not endangering the right to a fair trial. (Wilson, 1990, p. 3)

When asked whether the community power structure affected the board's decisions, Clark replied, "Well, it didn't influence mine . . . I was going to do what I thought was right" (Clark, 1990, p. 14). Several other board members spoke of trying to do the right thing in spite of community pressure. Former assistant superintendent Randolph also did not think the board had been influenced by the community power structure.

Johnson and Brown thought the newspaper had been an influence on the board's decisions. Speaking of the letters to the editor and the editorials, Johnson said:

> I think they brought a lot of pressure on the board. That is why we had to call some of our meetings, come out with some of our statements, and so forth. We had to let the public know that we were in fact doing something. We had to make statements about why we were taking our position of 'no action at this time,' because that is what was still best for the school system . . . I would go out to social activities, and everyone would want to know what really was going on. (Johnson, 1990, p. 20)

Brown thought that the newspaper had exerted a long-term influence by moving the board toward openness in its decision-making processes. Jones stated the newspaper had been fair. Clark complained about a lot of poor publicity. Miller said: "I think the school board was afraid of the newspaper" (Miller, 1990, p. 15). Editor Wilson did not believe the newspaper had influenced the board. In addition, he said: "I thought we were extremely cautious and generally supportive of the board" (Wilson, 1990, p. 4).

Clark, Miller, Smith, and Johnson said they were not influenced by the "Committee for a Responsible Educational System." Brown thought that the committee's lobbying had influenced the timing of the board's adoption of the sexual harassment policy, moving the board to act sooner than it might have acted without the committee's pressure. Committee organizer Canfield said she did not think her group had been influential, except perhaps in forcing the board to look more closely at some issues. Attorney Palmer thought the committee had influenced the quality of the

sexual harassment policy decisions.

School Board Culture

Two characteristics associated with school board culture are included in this category: (a) the pressure on boards to make unanimous decisions, and (b) the reliance of boards on policy to guide decision making. Those interviewed were asked whether unanimous decisions were typical of school boards in general or this board in particular. They were also asked whether the board would have decided things differently if there had been a sexual harassment policy in place at the time of the incident.

Several persons responded to the unanimous decision question. Clark said he did not see anything wrong with unanimous decisions. Editor Wilson said that unanimous decisions were typical of the board. Former assistant superintendent Randolph thought that unanimous decisions were proper for a board. Randolph said that if a decision is not unanimous that "sometimes it weakens those boards of education"; if decisions are unanimous, "The public can look at them and see that the board is acting in the group as a whole, not as separate individuals" (Randolph, 1990, p. 9). Attorney Palmer said he thought the criticism had not been of the unanimous decisions, but of the lack of open discussion in the decision-making process. He thought if board members had explained the reasons for their decisions the evening they accepted the resignation that a lot of the criticism of the board would not have occurred.

Board policy offered no guidance to the board in this situation. There was no policy on the continuing employment of employees charged with a crime, nor was there a policy on sexual harassment. Each board member offered an opinion about whether the initial decision to delay action until after a court decision would have been accompanied by "suspension with pay without prejudice pending the outcome of the trial" as stipulated in the sexual harassment policy ultimately approved by the board at its October 8 regular meeting (Board minutes, October 8, Sexual Harassment Policy, p. 9). Generally, there was agreement that if this policy had been in place at the time of the allegations against the superintendent, the policy would have made the decisions easier. Miller, Smith, Jones, and Johnson said the policy would have been followed. Brown was

not sure, and Clark said that would have depended upon legalities. Former assistant superintendent Randolph said the board would have followed the policy. The other three community persons interviewed either did not know, or were not sure, whether the board would have followed the policy. For example, attorney Palmer said he "didn't know," continuing:

> There are certain members of the board who, if the policy said that is what is going to happen, would have argued strenuously that there was no option but to follow it . . . I think there would have been at least three, and I am guessing those three could have gotten one of the others to come along with them and they might have had some impact. But I am still not sure that the others wouldn't have said, hey, even with this policy in effect, we are going to wait and see what the court system decides. We still don't know if there is anything that falls within the policy. (Palmer, 1990, p. 7)

Political Factors

Several persons interviewed were asked whether internal or external politics influenced the board's decisions. Answers ranged from "no" to "of course." Brown and Johnson thought that politics had influenced the board's decisions, but Jones disagreed. Jones stated: "Some board members would try to do quite a bit of lobbying on one thing or another, or try to encourage us to accept their opinions, but I think we were all pretty much an independent bunch and could arrive at what we felt was best" (Jones, 1990, p. 2). On the other hand, Johnson said: "The external politics were forcing the issue . . . the internal politics were influenced by the superintendent in masking his guilt, and then the politics within the board, the individual board members' belief or disbelief in him" (Johnson, 1990, p. 20). Attorney Palmer agreed with Brown that politics and political considerations are part of every decision made by a public body. In Brown's words, "Once you get on a board and get involved in all the various power struggles . . . whatever the issues, it begins to dawn on you that everything you do on a board of education is political . . . The whole thing in a lot of ways is about 'where is the power,' and in this situation to a very large degree, the power remained with the superintendent" (Brown, 1990, p. 18).

Social Issues

Those interviewed were asked whether or not the social issues of the mid-eighties, specifically sexual harassment and child abuse issues, influenced the decisions of the board. Seven persons, including board members Miller, Jones, Johnson, and Brown, commented on social issues. Generally these persons thought that the influence of social issues could be seen in the fact that the first young woman, as well as other persons, came forward with the charges against the superintendent and that the case was filed by the county attorney. Jones spoke quite definitely about how the social issues and the times were part of the situation and the board's decisions:

> I think they definitely played a part in that decision. As I look back at that time period now, I think that we were just beginning to come into an awareness of sexual harassment, an open public awareness of it. I think that we were beginning to have people feel confidence in the judicial system and in the legal system, that they could bring these things out into the open and appropriate decisions could be made (Jones, 1990, p. 7)

The formation of the "Committee for a Responsible Educational System" also was a sign of the times. Attention was being focused on preventing sexual and other kinds of abuse in the mid-eighties. Committee organizer Canfield, who was Chair of the Sexual Assault Task Force for the Area Women's Council, was a natural leader for those in the community who wanted to protest the board's inaction. Canfield thought that the board had not even been conscious of social issues.

Student Welfare

The final factor identified as an influence on the board's decisions was concern for student welfare. Clark, Jones, and Johnson said that every board decision was influenced by a concern for student welfare. Clark used these words: "When you are on something like a school board . . . the bottom line is the students. Finally that is the bottom line, because you have got to take them into consideration any time you start making important decisions, and if you can't do that, then you just better not make those decisions. I wouldn't know how else to do it" (Clark, 1990, p. 16). Brown believed that the major influence on the board's decisions had been concern for the superintendent's welfare rather than student welfare. Committee organizer Canfield was again

critical of the board, saying that student welfare had not been considered at all, "which is the tragedy of it" (Canfield, 1990, p. 5). Former assistant superintendent Randolph suggested that the board might have handled things differently had school been in session when the charges were filed.

Interpreting Factors and Issues Affecting Key Decisions

Part of the study was an extensive literature review focused on board-superintendent relationships, local politics of education, decision making generally, and school board decision making, in particular. Persons who study board of education decision making tend to write either for superintendents or for board members. Some scholars writing for the professionals have analyzed school board decision making in the context of board-superintendent relationships and the question whether the board or the superintendent governs (Eliot, 1959; Kerr, 1964; Boyd, 1976; Lutz and Iannaccone, 1970, 1978, 1986; Hentges, 1986). Typically, the focus of literature on board decision making addressed to professionals has been improvement of the board-superintendent relationship. Articles on board decision making addressed to board members usually have included a similar focus on improving the board-superintendent relationship, while recognizing that the board's decision making must serve the community.

A guidebook for effective school board service frequently given to new board members contains an entire chapter on board decision making. Factors such as board politics, ties to special interest groups, and whether the board member was elected or appointed can influence the decisions of a board member, according to the text (National School Boards Association, 1982, p. 79). Although much of the literature implies that organizations make decisions, in fact people are the decision makers. People make decisions as persons embedded in a network of social relationships. People on school boards are no exception. Exploration of two theoretical frameworks for explaining the interactions of the factors and issues affecting the key decisions will conclude this paper.

Constraints Model of Policymaking Processes

The Constraints Model of Policymaking Processes formulated by Irving Janis (1989) presents

an explanation for why, and under what circumstances, leaders of large organizations often make avoidable errors that result in faulty policy decisions. The basic premise is that low-quality decision-making procedures cause avoidable errors for individuals or groups. According to the model, particularly in stressful situations cognitive, affiliative, and egocentric constraints can cause policymakers, either as individuals or as a group, to make decisions according to simplistic rules rather than to practice vigilant problem solving procedures. When any one or a combination of these limiting forces becomes the dominant or crucial force affecting the decision making, then the policymakers may begin to show symptoms of defective policymaking. A cognitive constraint is a limitation on vigilant decision making due to problems in the supply of information or in the analysis of information. An affiliative constraint is a limitation of thinking resulting from personal relationships or friendships within a group. Egocentric constraints or limitations on vigilant decision making are due to self interest or the arousal of strong emotions that typically accompany high conflict stressful situations.

The assumption is that vigilant decision making features a pattern that is somehow disrupted by these constraints. Janis describes vigilant decision makers in these words: "They tend to go about the tasks of decisionmaking in a careful manner, carrying out to the best of their ability the essential steps of problemsolving. They search painstakingly for relevant information, assimilate information in a relatively unbiased manner, appraise alternatives carefully before making a choice, and do everything else required to meet the criteria for high-quality decisionmaking" (Janis, 1989, p. 78). In the decisions analyzed in this case study, the board members were operating under stress, without prior written policy, making policy decisions to the best of their ability in what was an ongoing crisis. They did not, however, seem to "search painstakingly for relevant information" nor remain unbiased. The three constraints identified by Janis may have affected board decision making in this stressful situation.

Cognitive Constraints. Cognitive constraints are of two types according to the theory: (a) limited resources of the organization to supply pertinent information, or (b) limited cognitive capabilities of the persons who must make the policy decision. In this situation, the board's access

to information was limited. Normally, this board of education had access to information relevant to its decisions through the superintendent who customarily made recommendations for action. Routine decision-making patterns and procedures were disrupted in this case, however, including the information-accessing pattern. The board chose to rely exclusively on the board attorney Spencer's legal advice. Acting according to his advice, their decisions to delay action, not to conduct a separate investigation, and not to look at the results of the county attorney's investigation, left the board without any formal access to information about the allegations against the superintendent. Although four of the board members did not feel their decisions were affected by a lack of access to information, the three community critics who were interviewed disagreed. In addition to the board's lack of information, attorney Palmer suggested that either the board members ignored the distinction he drew between the issue of effectiveness and the issue of presumption of innocence, or that they did not understand it. Such a lack of understanding, assuming Palmer's assessment to be accurate, provides an illustration of the second type of cognitive constraint.

Persons affected by cognitive constraints can tend to make "rapid fire" decisions according to Janis. A "rapid fire" decision is one made quickly, sometimes impulsively (Janis, 1989, pp. 34-35). The board's decision to bring in a local pastor during the May 14 meeting, a decision that was discussed by board members when interviewed, could be considered a rapid fire decision since it was made immediately after hearing from the superintendent about the allegations and charges pending against him. The pastor was hastily invited to the executive session following the regular board meeting. He was invited at the suggestion of the superintendent because the county attorney was a member of the pastor's congregation. Some board members wanted to prevent the filing of charges, asking the pastor to intervene with the county attorney on behalf of the superintendent. When interviewed, several board members said that involving the pastor had been a poor decision.

Reliance on "nutshell briefings" is another example of a simplistic rule that can be followed when cognitive constraints dominate. Janis defines reliance on a nutshell briefing as making a decision based upon a brief, oversimplified, and often biased look at a complex issue. In making

decisions associated with legal issues, the board members tended to rely on "nutshell briefings" from Spencer, the board attorney, who was a personal friend of the superintendent. Legal information presented to the board by an attorney hired by the "Committee for a Responsible Educational System" was discounted, as was legal analysis of the situation shared by attorney Palmer in a series of letters to individual board members.

Affiliative Constraints. Affiliative constraints arise from the relationships of policymakers with others in the organization, and the typical desire of policymakers to seek problem solutions that will not damage those relationships. The personal affiliations at work in this situation were numerous. Five of the six board members had a long history of working with the superintendent, with three former board members identifying him as a personal friend. The majority of the board members held the superintendent in high esteem professionally as well as personally. In addition, as has been stated, the board relied for legal advice on an attorney who was a personal friend of the superintendent.

One simplistic rule that can dominate when affiliative constraints operate is the "avoid punishment" rule. Particularly the board members who were personal friends of the superintendent may have made decisions based on wanting to "avoid punishment," or the superintendent's certain disfavor with them if he were to be tried and found innocent and they had suspended him from his duties, or required him to take a leave of absence. Both of these actions were considered by the board in the discussions that led to their position of "taking no action" until after the trial.

Egocentric Constraints. Egocentric constraints arise from strong personal or emotional needs, such as the need to act from an emotion like fear, anger, or affection. Egocentric needs also arise in high-conflict stressful situations, particularly when all alternatives are undesirable choices. "Emotional stress is aroused whenever policymakers realize that whichever course of action they choose could turn out badly, that they are likely to be held responsible and could suffer a loss of self-esteem" (Janis, 1989, p. 77). In this situation, the choice to take action against the superintendent initially by suspending him with pay, for example, was an undesirable alternative

for a majority of the board members. Unable to take an action that seemed to be turning against a friend, and possibly motivated by anger at the persons who had allowed these allegations to surface and charges to be filed, the board chose to take no action. This behavior, taking no action, is an example of a coping pattern called "defensive avoidance." Janis describes several other rules that can be followed when a person or group practices "defensive avoidance." These rules include, "Procrastinate if you can; otherwise pass the buck; or, if necessary, select the least objectionable alternative and bolster it by focusing on supporting arguments and ignoring opposing arguments" (Janis, 1989, p. 80). In the face of increasing opposition to its decision not to act, board members bolstered their argument for inaction and even reaffirmed the decision publicly in a second statement to the news media. Finally, in allowing the superintendent to take "early retirement" the board again selected an alternative less objectionable to them than cancelling his contract.

Summary. This brief exploration of application of the Constraints Model of Policymaking Processes to this case is only a partial analysis. A more complete analysis would require evaluation of the board's decision-making processes in terms of the steps of vigilant decision making and the alternate pathways to vigilant decision making. However, this discussion suggests that cognitive, affiliative, and egocentric constraints may have affected the board's key decisions. In summary, because they could no longer rely upon the superintendent, the board's routine procedure for accessing information was disrupted. Due to cognitive constraints, including lack of information, the board made at least one "rapid fire" decision and struggled with the complexity of the issues in responding to the allegations against the superintendent. Due to affiliative constraints, arising from the numerous personal relationships, the board's key decisions may have been influenced by the "avoid punishment" rule. Three of the former board members continue to identify the superintendent as a personal friend, and the board relied for legal advice on an attorney who identified the superintendent as a personal friend. Throughout the decision-making process, the board appeared to practice defensive avoidance, possibly due to egocentric constraints, making a final key decision only when pushed by the judge's verdict. Egocentric constraints typically arise in high conflict stressful situations when all alternatives are viewed as undesirable choices.

Whether any of the board's decisions were considered faulty depended upon the perspective of the interviewee. The decision to delay action was evaluated as faulty by several board members and the three community critics who were interviewed. The resignation acceptance decision was evaluated as faulty by the community representatives interviewed and by other critics in the community at the time, including the person who eventually filed an open meetings violation lawsuit against the board. However, although the two board members who voted for the resignation decision were not reelected, neither of them evaluated this board decision as faulty. Given the constraints model interpretation, the previously identified factors and issues having the major influence on the board's decision-making processes become: (a) the legal issues; (b) access to information; (c) belief in the innocence of the superintendent; and (d) personal relationships.

School Board Culture Research

Scholars working from several perspectives have considered the influence of the norms emphasized during the training and socialization of school board members on board decision making (Bailey, 1965; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; Lutz & Iannaccone, 1978; Kerr, 1963; Lutz, 1975, 1980; Cooper, 1973). Several findings from a body of literature that will be called school board culture research may also provide explanation of the board's decision-making processes.

Respect for the Superintendent. Writing from an anthropological perspective about the culture of school boards, Lutz (1980) emphasized that most school board members come to their roles with little previous political experience. School board training emphasizes respecting the fine line between policy and administration, as well as the importance of maintaining a united front. Partly as a result, Lutz wrote, board members tend to meet in private to work out the "right" solution, with the vast majority respecting the superintendent as the professional expert, "looking to the superintendent, almost exclusively, for recommendations and information" (Lutz, 1980, p. 459). Analyzing school board politics, Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) concluded that locally elected nonpartisan boards create a politics of insiders (p. 18). The politics of a particular issue are often invisible because traditionally school boards operate with the appearance of consensus and without open debate. This policy of informal agreement and low-conflict visibility leaves the insiders,

particularly the professionals, in prominent positions, with the school board open to control and manipulation, according to their analysis (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970). This case study of a board's decision-making processes illustrated meetings in private, a pattern of looking to the superintendent for information, the appearance of consensus, and respect for the superintendent that persisted even in the face of criminal allegations.

Access to Information. Cooper (1973) also concluded that a board's dependency on the superintendent for information puts the board at a disadvantage in conflicts with the superintendent. Cooper's solution was a separate independent staff, answerable only to the board, as a way for a board to have access to information unfiltered by the preferences of the administration. The events of this case study suggest that the board could have utilized the services of an independent staff, particularly to perform an information gathering role. It was difficult for the board to have access to information unfiltered by the preferences and perceptions of the superintendent. In his original disclosure to board members about the police investigation and pending charges, the superintendent emphasized his innocence, the low status and questionable character of the young woman making the initial allegations, and his belief that the county attorney was out to get him. Three board members essentially never did seriously question that interpretation of what had happened. The power of the superintendent's version of events was evidenced by the following board actions: (a) choosing not to conduct its own investigation; and (b) choosing not to accept the information file offered by the county attorney. After making those two decisions, the board continued to struggle with what information to access partly because of the superintendent's previous control of information. The personal and position power of the superintendent remained a strong influence on board decisions, including the two key decisions.

Private Decision Making. In research focused on the question of "who governs" education at the local level, the public or the professionals, Kerr (1964) concluded that boards did not control but merely legitimated the proposals of superintendents. In his study of the boards of education in two communities, Kerr observed that "almost none of the considerations that actually produced the board's decisions were revealed in public meetings" (1964, p. 44). In this case study the board's

two key decisions were simply announced, with little public meeting discussion. Thus, this case also illustrates as Kerr suggested how considerations producing board decisions are often not revealed in public meetings. This seemed particularly true of the board's acceptance of the "early retirement" resignation after a perfunctory presentation by board attorney Spencer at the September 5 special meeting. The entire meeting lasted ten minutes. The board members appeared, because of the absence of discussion at that meeting, to have come to the September 5 meeting with a decision already made. In fact, the board attorney and two board members had obtained the resignation during a visit to the superintendent's home earlier that day. The board actually made more than 11 decisions as this case unfolded, although only 11 are documented in public records. Some of these other decisions or "agreements" were worked out in private in two and three person meetings or conversations that sometimes involved board attorney Spencer.

School Board Council Style. Lutz and Iannaccone (1978) reported research on the concept of school board council style and under what conditions a board may move from an elite to an arena council style. The theory behind school board council style was originated by Bailey (1965), a political anthropologist, who studied decision making in India. Bailey was particularly interested in the way many Indian village councils reached their decisions through consensus. Councils favoring decisions arrived at through consensus he called "elite" councils. Councils favoring decisions arrived at through open debate were called "arena" councils by Bailey.

Lutz (1975) utilized Bailey's theory and terminology in his analysis of school boards as sociocultural systems, writing: "School boards responding according to the traditional culture of school boards behave in elite council fashion" (p. 70). He cited as additional evidence the common belief that school board decisions should be unanimous and disagreement should not be made public. The board's decision-making procedures in this case study did not reflect openly the conflict that was occurring in executive sessions. The board came close to open conflict only when board president Brown abstained in the vote to accept the early retirement resignation, stating that she was not in favor of the financial settlement, but did not want to oppose the resignation. In addition to avoiding open conflict and maintaining a united front, this board exhibited one other

characteristic of "elite" council behavior that Lutz called typical of school boards, i.e., the prevalence of a trustee orientation. A trustee orientation was revealed in several board member's comments about wanting to do the "right" thing and not be swayed by public pressure.

According to Lutz's (1980) theory, when a board moves in the direction of "arena" council behavior, the cause is often community conflict that can result in the defeat of incumbent board members. The events reported in this case study divided the community. Going to the polls in an atmosphere of conflict about the behaviors of the superintendent and the decision making of the board, the voters defeated incumbents Miller and Smith, who had voted for the resignation and financial settlement, and reelected board president Brown who had abstained. Getting the message, the board moved in the direction of more open or "arena" council decision-making behavior after this election of two new board members, one of whom was attorney Palmer. An additional factor in the movement toward an arena council style was the filing of an open meetings violation lawsuit against the board in October.

Summary. From the perspective of these selected findings, the previously identified factors and issues having the major influence on the board's decision-making processes become: (a) pervasive internal and external political factors; (b) belief in the superintendent's innocence, associated with dependence on and respect for the superintendent; (c) access to information; and (d) school board culture, specifically the norms associated with elite council style, i.e., the appearance of consensus, private decision making, and a trustee orientation.

Conclusions

It has been argued that "case studies . . . are often considered nonuseful because 'they are not a suitable basis for generalization' " (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Nevertheless, when restricted to similar situations, "a working hypothesis developed in Context A might be applicable in Context B" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this spirit, although an identical situation seems unlikely, four working hypotheses are offered about another board's decision-making processes in a similar crisis involving the superintendent and criminal activity: (a) That a board's decisions will be

influenced by the interaction of a variety of factors, including political, economic, and legal considerations; (b) That access to appropriate information will be an issue; (c) That the board member-superintendent relationship will have significant influence on the board's decisions; and (d) That board members will base decisions largely on personal values, including friendship, and beliefs about what is "right."

More importantly, one interpretation of the factors and issues affecting the board's decisions suggests that the constraints to vigilant decision making identified by Janis may have been operating. An implication of that analysis could be that board of education members who are aware of the constraints to vigilant decision making in crisis situations may be less likely to commit certain avoidable errors. Additional factors to be aware of include those associated with school board culture. Board members who are as conscious as possible of all the factors that may affect board decisions will be the most effective decision makers in those inevitable crises that accompany service on a board of education.

Because vigilant approaches to decision making may prove difficult, particularly in any type of emotional crisis situation, those who provide training to school board members may wish to educate board members about the Constraints Model of Policymaking Processes. Furthermore, those researching board of education decision making may wish to focus research on the degree to which the constraints identified by Janis affect board of education decision-making processes. The following words seem an appropriate description of this case study report:

> Boards of directors are hard to study. Often they conduct their business in secret; their members are busy people; the processes themselves are sometimes most effectively described by novelists. Nevertheless, study is possible, and pieces of evidence can be brought to bear. The difficulty of study is more than compensated for by the theoretical and practical importance of the problem. (Zald, 1969, p. 110)

References

Bailey, F. G. (1965). Decisions by consensus in councils and committees: With special reference to village and local government in India. In M. Banton (Ed.). Political systems and the distribution of power. London: Tavistock Publications.

Becoming a better board member. (1982). Washington, DC: National School Boards Association.

Boyd, W. L. (1976). The public, the professionals, and educational policy making: Who governs? Teachers College Record, 77, 56.

Brown, Susan. (1990). Former board president. Interview by Nancy Svoboda, May 3, Lincoln, Nebraska. Tape recording. Transcript, 1-22.

Canfield, Carol. (1990). Coordinator of Committee for a Responsible Educational System. Interview by Nancy Svoboda, April 29. Tape recording. Transcript, 1-10.

Clark, Bob. (1990). Former board member. Interview by Nancy Svoboda, May 3. Tape recording. Transcript, 1-16.

Cooper, B. S. (1973). A staff for school boards. Administrator's Notebook, 21(3).

Eliot, T. H. (1959, December). Toward an understanding of public school politics. American Political Science Review, 53, 1032-1051.

Hentges, J. T. (1986). The politics of superintendent-school board linkages: A study of power, participation, and control. ERS Spectrum, 4(3), 23-32.

Hoeltke, G. M. (1990). Attestation. (In: Lyman, L. L. Factors and issues affecting board of education decisions: A case study. Doctoral dissertation, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 229-233).

Iannaccone, L. & Lutz, F. W. (1970). Politics, power and policy: The governing of local school districts. Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company.

Janis, I. L. (1989). Crucial Decisions. New York: The Free Press.

Johnson, Mike. (1990). Former board member. Interview by Nancy Svoboda, April 29. Tape recording. Transcript, 1-22.

Jones, Janice. (1990). Former board member. Interview by Nancy Svoboda, April 30 and May 11. Tape recording. Transcript, 1-8.

Kerr, N. D. (1963). The school board as an agency of legitimation. Sociology of Education, 38(1), 34-59.

Lance, D. (1978). Oral history project design. In D. K. Dunaway and W. K. Baum (Ed.). Oral history: An interdisciplinary anthology. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History.

Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Newbury Park-London-New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Lutz, F. W. (1975). Local school boards as sociocultural systems. In P. J. Cistone (Ed.). Understanding school boards. 63-76. Lexington: D. C. Heath and Co., Lexington Books.

Lutz, F. W. (1980). Local school board decision-making: A political-anthropological analysis. Education and Urban Society, 12(4), 452-465.

Lutz, F. W. & Iannaccone, L. (1978). Public participation in local school districts. Lexington: Lexington Books.

Lutz, F. W. & Iannaccone, L. (1986, February). The dissatisfaction theory of American democracy: A guide for politics in local school districts. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of School Administrators. San Francisco. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 274 041).

Lyman, L. L. (1990). Factors and issues affecting board of education decisions: A case study. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nebraska-Lincoln).

McMillan, J. H. & Schumacher, S. (1984). Research in education. Boston: Little, Brown.

Merriam, S. B. (1988). Case study research in education: A qualitative approach. San Francisco-London: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Miller, Ray. (1990). Former board member. Interview by Nancy Svoboda, April 30. Tape recording. Transcript, 1-21.

Palmer, Tim. (1990). Former board candidate and present board member. Interview by Nancy Svoboda, April 29. Tape recording. Transcript, 1-15.

Randolph, David. (1990). Former assistant superintendent. Interview by Nancy Svoboda, April 29. Tape recording. Transcript, 1-11.

Smith, Oliver. (1990). Former board member. Interview by Nancy Svoboda, April 3. Tape recording. Transcript, 1-16.

Wilson, Jim. (1990). Newspaper editor. Interview by Nancy Svoboda, April 30. Tape recording. Transcript, 1-17.

Zald, M. N. (1969, July). The power and functions of boards of directors: A theoretical synthesis. American Journal of Sociology, 75, 97-111.

Appendix A

Interview Guide Questions

1. What were three critical or key decisions -- in terms of consequences for the board, the school district, and the community? What factors affected those decisions, in your opinion?
2. What was the best decision the board made? What was the worst decision? Why?
3. If the board could redo one decision, what one would you recommend?
4. According to editorials and letters to the editor, the board was perceived as refusing to act during June, July, and August. Was that accurate? Why or why not?
5. What was the most significant influence on the decisions made during that time?
6. Why do you think the board chose not to conduct its own investigation?
7. Were board decisions affected by lack of access to information?
8. Did personal relationships influence decisions?
9. Did the community power structure influence decisions?
10. Did the newspaper influence decisions?
11. Did the superintendent influence the board's decisions?
12. Did the activities of the Committee for a Responsible Educational system influence the board's decisions?
13. Did legal factors influence the board's decisions?
14. Did economic factors influence the board's decisions?
15. Did the community influence the board's decisions?
16. Did social issues/the times influence the board's decisions?
17. Did internal or external politics affect the board's decisions?
18. Did concern for the welfare of students influence the board's decisions?
19. Decision 11 -- If this policy had been in place when charges were made against the superintendent, do you think the board would have followed the policy? How would that have changed outcomes?